

HIPPIE HAT BRAIN PARASITE

"Bill," Kiln says, his voice all too clear, that unreal clarity of early AM long distance commsat voices speaking from the void or maybe Cleveland, "I've SEEN one." And something about the practiced intensity of the spoken-word italics he brings to that SEEN triggers a memory-hologram, Mervyn Kihn in his patented Chas. Fort Hawaiian shirt, a screaming sail of lurid Taiwanese nylon ablaze with frog-storms, spontaneous human combustees, Lubbock lights, New Jersey mothmen, and a doomed wing of U.S. Navy torpedo bombers about to vanish forever into the Bermuda triangle.

"Wait a minute, Merv. Where was it you said you were calling from?" It's collect, natch.

A pause, "Night falls," he intones.

"WHAT?"

"Knight Falls," and he spells it out. "Ohio."

"Okay... Now what was it you were saying you'd seen?"

"Ah... Look... You've seen 'em yourself. Plenty. Wide stiff brim, high crown, cut out of a sheet of Tandy cowhide and laced together like a Boy's Life project. Get the picture?"

"Those hats? Kind of Waylon Jennings cum L.A. pimp culture hats? Well, I can't say I've seen one lately, man."

"Right! And it's too cold for the motherfuckers, up there, that's why! Add that to the evidence!"

"What evidence, Merv? What motherfuckers?"

"PARASITES," he whispers, "Alien fucking parasites..."

Mervyn Kihn, Gonzo Fortean, author of nine paperback assem-

blies of Damned Things too unspeakably singular to warrant the attention of even the most depraved assemblers of apocrypha. The menstruating Barbie Dolls of Lone Butte. Luminous phantom Dachshunds, sighted flying in tight formation over Berlin, August '58. The Monopoly board unearthed in Crete and subsequently suppressed by Greek authorities. The bizarre case of Ruth Edith Fishleigh, the Birmingham psychic, found drowned in a Toyota full of Dr.Pepper...

"The Haight, that was the lucius. That must have been where they landed. Maybe just one. Maybe just a spore. But I've definitely traced them to Frisco Circa'68. Leather shops all over."

"Uh, wait a minute, Merv, I, uh..."

"Listen. This is crucial, man. You think those things are just, like, some stupid kind of hat, right? Maybe THE stupid kind of hat, and that's fucking brilliant. Last thing YOU'D be caught wearing, right? And it's people like you who pose the greatest threat, people with open minds, people who read my books. But I've finally SEEN one, man and I KNOW."

"How do you mean, SEEN?"

"Off. I saw one off. I was in Taos last week. Wave of mutilation cases. Totally unconnected."

"Cattle?"

"Rosicrucians."

"Jesus..."

"Not people, man, magazines, All those AMORC ads. You know, in the back of Popular Mechanics... But I was there, see, and I went into this coffee shop, and there's this guy wearing one of those hats. So I'm sitting there, trying to work up a new angle on the Rosicrucian caper, and I notice this guy's, sorta, like, nodding out, you know? Not drinking his coffee, and it's not so much like he's falling asleep, more like he's having a kind of very slow seizure of some kind. Kinda twitching and blinking, but all in slow motion. So we're alone in the place, except for the

waitress, and I say, 'Hey buddy, you okay?' and he doesn't answer. They must've spread out from Haight-Ashbury, see, and now they're in these weird pocket areas of Sixties hipcult holdouts. You get some of these dudes in the commune, man, they look pretty zombied-out anyway. Perfect. Perfect cover. Like stick insects. Ever see a horseshoe crab?"

"Sort of helmet-shaped thing with a long spike for a tail?"

"Got it. Well, you imagine one of those, but no tail. Instead it's got this sort of stiff skirt, this sort of membrane, sticking out all around it, and the helmet part's just the right size."

"The right size for what?"

"So I'm watching this guy, see, and he's right out of it, and I'm getting kind of worried. 'Hey' I say to the waitress, 'is this guy okay?' She just pops her gum and shrugs. It's that kind of place. Then he picks up his coffee, raises it to his mouth, and pours some into his lap, meanwhile making these lip motions and swallowing. Well, right then, I got the VIBE, man..." He falls silent. I listen to ten seconds of expensive static.

"What vibe, Merv?"

"The unknown. Once again I found myself confronted with the Unknown. It just HAPPENS to me. I'm ATTUNED."

"Got you. Right. So, there you are, your attuned, and...?"

"Very slowly, like very slowly, he lowers the cup. And then he starts to fall forward. It was an old one, see, or maybe sick. But it's so slow, it doesn't look like he's falling, actually. Like he's very gradually leaning toward the counter... I don't figure, like, there sold in stores, you know? You see one in a store, it's just like a hat. Kinda like if stick insects talked people into manufacturing sticks, sort of. Weird variant on the mimitec trip, but we're talking ALIEN, right? What they probably do, they probably CRAWL around on those Godawful little legs. Up wells. In win- dows. Some guys wasted on his R. Crumb sofa, TV on, the bong near at hand, and he doesn't even hear the HAT..."

"Legs. You said legs?"

"Maybe a dozen, more. Kinda brown transparent. Ever see a scorpion that's gotten to big? They get kind of pale and waxy. Like that. Anyway, there I am, belly to belly with the unknown in this Taos coffee shop, and this guys getting closer to the edge of the counter. Like he's toppling over, but he hasn't heard about gravity. I hold my breath."

I hold mine.

"His chest touches the counter. Bip. Then it happened."

"Okay. What? Happened?"

"His hat fell off. Fell on the counter, I got a good look at the legs, the mouth parts. No eyes. Then I was off that stool like I had a cat-tleprod rammed up my ass. 'Cause he'd flopped off his stool, man, and he was DEAD. Or something like it. No BRAIN. No top of his HEAD. Just neatly nibbled off at the... hatline. Kinda SCARRED, in there, healed over, grayish-pink. I saw where the hat had had it's claws in, kinda puppet trip..."

"Merv. What about the waitress, Merv?"

"She said, 'Have a nice day.' She was, you know, just real mellow. Didn't seem to notice anything."

I close my eyes, tight. "Merv, why did you call? I mean, why me?"

"You write about stuff like that."

"Right. What about the Rosicrucian coupon-mutilators?"

"Moonies... it's a takeover bid. Every Moonie in United States joined the Rosicrucians last month. But your hip to the information trip the CIA's been running on Scientology, right? Same deal. The hot item there's that it was the DISNEY people who had Hubbard snuffed in Akron in '71. What they've got in there now is an advanced animatronics dummy. Because, natch, they wanted L. Ron's cryogenics lab for what's left of Walt..."

"Thanks, Merv."

"Hey, no sweat. We're pals. I'll keep you posted, baby. And for Christ's sake, stay out of those HEADSHOPS, right?"

"Goodnight, Merv."

"Morning. It's morning here already."

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